

An Anarchist Position Paper: The Save Happy Valley Campaign

Preamble

As anarchists involved in the environmental Save Happy Valley Campaign (SHVC) we naturally find ourselves in the minority. This was not a major problem during the initial stages of the campaign due to both the general underdevelopment of the campaign as a whole and the dominance our ideas within the group.

For the last while, however, there has been a large influx in nondescript “environmentalists”, “conservationists” and “greenies” who generally ascribe to the dominant *liberal environmental* framework. We have found our position increasingly marginalised and we have been unable to properly articulate and defend our stance on various issues relating to the campaign in the face of the liberal environmental position, given that it is based on the status quo and therefore seemingly common sensical.

We have, therefore, developed this position paper to serve two main goals:

- To force ourselves to examine and clarify our own position on a number of critical areas relating to the campaign, and hopefully give ourselves confidence to act accordingly
- To allow others to understand the basis for the positions we take and the practices we employ

We also hope that this document makes it clear that we take these positions not because they are the most radical or anarchist, nor because they are ideologically pure, but because they are the most effective in the long term.

The Liberal Environmental Framework

It is important to make the dominant environmental position explicit. Many who hold this position can claim to represent a position that is simply “environmental” or “conservationist”, or otherwise non-ideological, while the rest of their political position remains invisible because it conforms to the status quo. In making the invisible aspect of this framework visible, we can begin to see its assumptions, vision and flaws.

- The State is neutral arbiter of social, economic and political life. It is a legitimate institution, founded on social consensus.
- We live in a democracy. Politicians and elected representatives seek to genuinely represent the polity, and can be swayed through careful consideration of facts, or through appeals from those they represent.
- Progress is driven through the development and implementation of progressive or environmental policies.
- Current flaws derive from bad policies or bad politicians. The current democratic

capitalist system is perfectable by the application of good policies and election of good politicians.

- The capitalist economy is not essentially flawed, but requires appropriate State policies and constraints to tame it in a desirable and socially useful way.

Capitalism, the State and the Environment

Our understanding of the world is very different. We understand the proposed destruction and mining of Happy Valley as one symptom of economic and political forces that are operating to decimate the environment on a global scale. We see seemingly disparate phenomena such as the felling of the Brazilian Rainforest, the poisoning of the oceans and anthropogenic climate change as being caused by systemic economic and political forces, namely capitalism and the State.

We do not see capitalism or the state as separate entities; we see them as interdependent, reliant on each other but also with interests of their own. Capitalism is an economic system based on the ownership or control of the means of production (that is the land, forests, buildings, factories, shops, etc.) by a small portion of the population, for which the remaining must work with little or no control. It is also a system of managed consumption whereby an ever-expanding variety of needs and desires are constructed through a multiplicity of techniques (advertising, disciplinary techniques, cultural demands, etc.).

The capitalist economic system is not based on consent. Every capitalist society has arisen alongside the development of the State and is born of a violent history whereby the unequal material and power relations inherent to capitalism are forcibly imposed by the utilisation of the armed forces (both police and military) to quash attempts to escape colonisation and capitalisation. In this regard, Aotearoa is no different with a long history of state repression against Maori seeking to escape colonisation and from workers seeking to escape capitalist relations. The State is, therefore, a set of institutions whose primary goal is the enforcement of private property and the capitalist economy which was, at first, guaranteed by direct repression and is now maintained by more subtle and nuanced techniques, at least in the minority world.

We understand the global degradation of the environment to be caused by several key features of capitalism and the state:

- The centralisation of economic and political power, in the form of employers/directors/corporate leaders and politicians/State bureaucracy, to the exclusion of most. The desires of the excluded, such as ecological sustainability, are thus submerged and rendered powerless.
- The demand for economic growth and need for new markets. While in the past this generally took the form of geographic expansion (via colonialism and imperialism), today such demand focuses on increasing the level of penetration of existing spaces and societies by defining an ever-widening sphere as subject to the control of the market.
- The demand for profit, seen as the sole arbiter of success.
- The use of the State system, notably its political and legal apparatus, for the long-term advancement of both the status of capital and the institutions of the State itself, in direct opposition to community. In addition, we acknowledge that both the State and capital make short-term concessions if it is judged to ensure their stability in the face of

crisis/opposition, or advance their long-term interests.

It should be clear that the capitalist economy stands at odds with the environment, willing to exploit it when profits await. Indeed, in many instances, the wholesale destruction of the environment is *good* for the economy. Only when similar profits can be made from a different utilisation of the environment (ie. tourism) or when the destruction of an area poses a threat to certain political players (or even the overall stability of the system) will alternatives be considered.

In this push to advance the economic dictates of the capitalist economy most people find themselves compelled to work, or else face poverty. In cases where it is profitable to destroy and exploit the environment, workers find themselves the agents of this destruction with little power to resist. They must either internalise the justifications for this destruction or else comply with a troubled conscience. The split between workers' economic well-being and the environment is a false antagonism born of the capitalist economy that, unfortunately, has real consequences for both in the immediate future.

Finally, the effects of environmental devastation will be felt most strongly by the poorest despite being a result of actions taken by the most powerful. This can be seen in a number of areas, from those most likely to be affected by the rising sea levels (Pacific islands) and drying up of village wells (sub-Saharan Africa) caused by climate change, to the villagers across Asia and Africa evicted from their subsistence farming land to make way for genetically modified and/or cash crops. In general, the world's poorest are worst equipped to cope with both a changing environment and natural disasters, the latter increasingly caused by the former.

The Anarchist Vision: Libertarian Communism

Anarchist practice does not make a distinction between ends and means; that is, we believe the practices we employ must in some way prefigure, anticipate and build towards our vision of a free and ecological society. Such a vision towards which we work can broadly be described as *libertarian communism*.

- A stateless society based on the principles of self-management, autonomy and decentralisation freely organised principally around the community. Wider levels of cooperation between communities are coordinated as needed based on non-hierarchical, mandated and recallable delegation.
- A non-hierarchical and cooperative economy where all productive property is held socially and where production and consumption are self-managed and operate on the principle "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their desires". Unmediated by money and other abstract economic imperatives (growth, profit, managed consumption etc.), such an economy would not be opposed to environmental sustainability but would instead have the agility to integrate environmental practices.
- An ecological society of decentralised production, where communities are both directly connected to the environment they are situated within and have the collective power to control their own environmental practices. This is as opposed to the current situation where most people are alienated from ecological processes, thus inhibiting an environmental awareness, and where there is a centralisation of power, thus precluding

the ability to implement environmental practices in any case.

Our Goals with Happy Valley

We have a strong desire to save Happy Valley and its complex ecology from the ravages of the digger and dynamite. We are also aware, however, of a history of similar campaigns, both successful and unsuccessful, that have gone before us without seriously challenging the structural, political and economic drives that have necessitated them in the first place. Straight success with this campaign does not necessarily lend itself to more thoroughgoing social change unless we start creating the conditions for that change now. We hope to therefore save Happy Valley and do so in such a way as to both undermine these driving structural factors as well as encourage tendencies of libertarian communism.

These tendencies we wish to encourage are best surmised in the following excerpt:

“Meaningful action, for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the equalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of the masses and whatever assists in their demystification.

“Sterile and harmful action is whatever reinforces the passivity of the masses, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others – even by those allegedly acting on their behalf.” – Solidarity, Britain, c. 1970

When posed with the question of whether we would rather save Happy Valley and do so without seriously challenging the structural drives that have led to its proposed mining, or challenge those structural drives but risk losing Happy Valley, we come to a cautious but resolute siding with the latter. We believe focussing on short-term successes at the expense of long-term ecological change sacrifices countless other species to climate change and arbitrary capitalist imperatives. Having said this, we believe opposing mining in Happy Valley according to such tendencies is likely to be the most effective.

Our Involvement with the Mainstream Media

The mainstream media is the bastion of the status quo. In Aotearoa, except in exceptional circumstances, media owners do not exert right-wing editorial control as is notorious in the USA, Australia and Italy (to give but three of many possible examples). Instead, it is the institutional position of journalists, the socialisation they undergo throughout their study and as they later seek to obtain and advance their careers, and their relative affluence that determines their bias. This bias is of a strongly moderate nature, almost always angled through the lens of the dominant discourse, and usually critical of both the radical left and extreme right. Marginal positions are usually ridiculed, and events are translated in such a way so as to create spectacular stories, devoid of context and history.

In response to this bias, those who engage with the media, including the Save Happy Valley Coalition, learn to engage in self-censorship and employ other techniques in an effort to lessen the worst exigencies of the media. This has at times resulted in favourable stories, but it has also meant we have allowed ourselves to be shaped, constrained and limited. We have adopted moderate positions for the media and have subsequently found ourselves adopting these

positions in actuality. We have engaged in extensive self-censorship, disbanding with all critiques that are likely to confuse the media or likely to be ridiculed. Moreover, we have limited our own behaviour, and the behaviour of others within or associated with the group, in an attempt to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the media. Worse yet, even our most moderate lines have been subject to ridicule and manipulation.

The liberal environmental position sees the mainstream media as the most effective lobbying tool, to be utilised and effectively employed at great cost. This position sees the media as hugely influential towards both politicians as well as the amorphous 'general public', and perceives positive media coverage as directly related to advancing their aims.

We believe the perceived role of the media by the liberal environmental position is grossly exaggerated. We are opposed to lobbying (see: Strategy), we believe the role of 'public support' is limited in advancing our goal (see: Public Support), and it seems to us that there is little else derived from engaging with the media. Put simply, this campaign, and wider social change, will not be won or lost in the media.

In light of this, we believe the self-censorship and other self-imposed constraints employed to gain positive media coverage are unjustified. Dealing with the media (producing media releases, etc.) does not necessarily undermine the goals of this campaign and may occasionally spark active involvement, but this engagement must be done in such a way that does not compromise our vision, strategy and analysis.

Direct Communication

In light of the limitations of the media in conveying our aim, the environmental facts, our critique and our strategy, we believe far more impetus should be placed on techniques of direct and unmediated communication. In particular, this includes the internet, leaflets, posters, stalls, etc.

Public Support

We consider 'public support' to be those who agree with our aim, but whose maximum participation does not exceed, for example, occasional letter writing, postcards or perhaps at most participation in a large march. That is, it is passive support.

Public support does not translate in any direct form to social change, and in and of itself will not win this campaign. This form of lobbying is a carryover from liberal campaigning that, like the media, seeks to exert pressure on decision makers. Implicit in this idea is the notion that decision makers listen to those they claim to represent. However, this sort of lobbying is not only disempowering (see: Strategy) but is only likely to be successful when public support translates into directly challenging and undermining those in power, such as immediately prior to an election time. Even here, however, widespread passive support may be useless as we saw with the G.E. Free campaign, which had almost 80% public support and large marches¹.

¹ This failure was primarily because a purportedly left-wing government was seeking re-election. As left-wing governments defend attacks from the right, discourse generally becomes more and more right wing, such that at the

Public support does not play an immediate role in winning a campaign whose strategy is based on direct action. However, the aim of engagement with ‘the public’ should be to turn passive support into active involvement in the campaign, and this should be encouraged through genuinely communicating our strategy and by organising direct action that is tailored to mass participation.

Strategy

“*Reclaim the Streets* does not see direct action as a last resort, but a preferred way of doing things ... a way for individuals to take control of their own lives and environments ... If global civilisation does not manage to destroy the ecosphere and human civilisation ... and a new culture of social and ecological justice is developed, *Reclaim the Streets* would hope that direct action would not stop but continue to be a central part of a direct democratic system.” – *Reclaim the Streets*

The Save Happy Valley Coalition has, up till this point, engaged primarily in lobbying through postcards and media stunts. Other organizations we have worked closely with, notably Forest and Bird, have pursued legal avenues and we have generally supported them where possible. The occupation, alone, stands out as a tactic that has served both as a form of direct action and a media stunt².

We have reached a point where both the political (ie. lobbying) and legal avenues have been exhausted. The Resource Consents process, the Environmental Court and the High Court have all legitimised the destruction of Happy Valley and the Department of Conservation has actively facilitated this process.

We must stress, however, that we choose direct action not because it is the last option available. We believe direct action represents both the most effective tactic to save Happy Valley, and also that this tactic prefigures the alternative society we seek in the long term. Indeed, both lobbying and legal challenges work *within* the institutions of capitalism and the State – the very institutions that have created this problem in the first place – and such a tactic is not only contradictory but also works to legitimate them. Moreover, engagement with lobbying and legal challenges works against long-term change by suppressing our immanent power, opposing those tendencies required for libertarian communism, and instead reinforces the structures of power that exist over and above ourselves.

Our description of the specific implementation of direct action can be found elsewhere, but let us broadly describe strategy we advocate, to which there are two components: stopping Solid Energy so that the mine is not possible, and costing Solid Energy so that the mine is not profitable. That is, we believe we need a defensive direct action strategy of physical intervention that seeks to delay, damage and stop developments within the Valley, and this includes defence of the occupation, as well as an offensive strategy of economic damage that seeks to cost Solid Energy and undermine revenues.

time of the 2003 elections no major party, besides the Green party, believed G.E. to be an issue. As such, public opinion was not a serious threat to Labour’s power.

² The railway lock-on also had the potential to be direct action as well as media stunt. Unfortunately, the cost of the four hour delay was accounted for over the course of the next week by a slightly modified railway schedule, thus providing no significant cost to Solid Energy. For this tactic to be costly to Solid Energy, a commitment to long-term delay will have to be made.

In this strategy there is scope for legal challenges if viewed solely as a delaying and costing tactic, but we believe that this should be made an open and explicit aim of such challenges.

Internal Dynamics

The centralisation of power and knowledge within the campaign is a serious issue. During our national hui, we have at times paid lip service to this issue, but action has not yet appeared in any serious manner. There has appeared an informal ‘inner core’ of people who make decisions, with whom discussion of ideas occurs first, and whose opinions are most strongly weighted. The informal core has been created from people occupying certain important roles both within the campaign and in other organisations, or otherwise making themselves indispensable (through the exclusive possession of certain knowledges). This is disempowering to those who are not in this ‘inner core’ and is likely to result in them scaling back their involvement. The immediate remedy to this situation is the constant rotation of roles, sharing of skills and knowledge, and commitment to existing process.

The organisational structure of the Coalition has also undergone a process of centralisation. Originally set up as a network of autonomous groups, these groups have been steadily subsumed under an overarching Coalition identity. It must be stressed that local or affinity groups are where the bulk of organisation and activity is meant to occur, and the Coalition umbrella is merely a convenient label for joint projects (website, occupation, joint media releases). In part, this unitary identity has been forced onto us by engagement with the media.

We are also concerned with the recent hegemony of the liberal environmental position and the ongoing suppression of anarchist politics. This suppression – the derision of anarchist politics, declaring it as a “distraction”, the silencing of radical voices – is unacceptable and, to a large extent, has necessitated this position piece in the first place. One way we may look at combating this silencing is through the formation of a Coalition-wide anarchist affinity group that works in parallel with the local groups.

Workers and Unions

We do not believe that the miners and other Solid Energy workers are the problem. Nor do we believe that this campaign should focus on encouraging the workers to find ‘ethical jobs’, as this not only places the impetus for change on those without power, but also assumes the existence of jobs elsewhere within the capitalist economy that are ethical.

Collectively, Solid Energy workers hold a considerable amount of power. The ideal course of action would involve the workers feeling so strongly about saving Happy Valley that they would refuse to work on its destruction. Under current employment law this would be grounds to be fired. A green ban declared under the aegis of the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (who currently hold a multi-employer agreement for Solid Energy workers, including contractors) is similarly illegal, but only places the union itself at risk. Both these scenarios, however, are unlikely as the first puts individual workers at risk and the latter expects the EPMU to act illegally, which is highly unlikely given its tendency towards partnership unionism and its

extremely close relationship with the Labour Party.

Other options for action by workers involves those working at the Lyttelton Port refusing to work Solid Energy's ships (under the Maritime Union), or of the train workers refusing to transport coal (under the Railway and Maritime Transport Union). Both of these options, however, are also illegal.

The final possibility for direct action by workers is to include a green ban as part of negotiating demands the next time negotiations come round. The EPMU's current contract expires in March 2007. This needs to be further investigated.

The EPMU can support us in our campaign, however, if it were willing to at least come out in support of us, or distribute our materials to Stockton workers. This would be a symbolic victory, and could potentially lend itself to future direct action by workers.

West Coast Community

There are a couple of outcomes that would result when mining does not occur at Happy Valley. Most obviously, a portion of those employed at Stockton mine are based on the West Coast and may be fired by Solid Energy earlier than they otherwise would have. More importantly, a portion of Solid Energy's revenues are directed into the West Coast economy via workers, contractors and other expenses; this is likely to be reduced when Happy Valley does not proceed.

Short of libertarian communism, we advocate mitigation of this by the redirection of Solid Energy's profits as well as the existing West Coast development fund (generated after the partial cessation of native forest logging) towards the acquisition of capital required for self-managed workers' cooperatives that are of a sustainable nature. We recognise that this is a partial solution because such cooperatives still operate within a competitive economy, but they would not be under the same pressures for growth and, moreover, they would act as schools in workers self-management, thus also developing tendencies towards libertarian communism.